

PORTO RICAN SCHOOLS

The Gradual Adoption of American Educational Methods.

Recent Examinations for Teachers' Certificates and the Satisfactory Results.

Anselm B. Brown of Los Angeles, Cal., who has been serving as English supervisor in schools at Ponce, Porto Rico, has just returned from that island and is in this city for a few days. The following account of the teachers' examinations which he gave a Star reporter today will be of great interest to people interested in educational work:

"Everything in educational work in Porto Rico must be done in conformity with the regulations of the school laws," said Mr. Brown. "These laws have been printed in both English and in Spanish. The need of them is readily understood by all American teachers, but they are a puzzle to the Porto Ricans. It is proving an education in itself for the Porto Rican teachers and the people generally down there to learn the details of the public school system of the United States, and especially the orderly and systematic methods of conducting examinations and issuing certificates to successful candidates. Teachers' examinations were held last July, and again in September. Notices were fully given in the Spanish papers, and particulars were clearly stated as to the manner in which they would be conducted.

The Teachers' Examinations.

"All the examinations were in writing from questions furnished by the insular board of education, and were held under the supervision of the English supervisors, of which there are thirty-seven—one for each district. The examinations in all the districts were held on the same day and the papers were promptly returned to the board of education at San Juan, to be marked by the committee appointed for that purpose.

"These proceedings, simple as they are to the great army of teachers in the states, were very strange to Porto Rican teachers who wanted to get certificates under the United States system of education, in order to receive appointments and draw pay from the military government. Many teachers presented their old credentials, and laid much stress upon the long time they had been engaged in teaching, while, in fact, some of them utterly lacked qualifications to teach. Others who came to the examinations, wanted to take the papers home and fill out the answers there. They were greatly surprised that these privileges could not be granted. Others wanted to take the examinations at some other date than the time fixed. After the examinations were over candidates continued to apply, and felt that they were unfairly treated because they could not be examined at later dates. It was a good deal for them to learn that the school laws would be strictly conformed to, and that there could be no teachers' examinations in the government schools except at the dates fixed upon and duly advertised.

Many Candidates.

"About 150 teachers, or candidates, in all the districts took the examinations in July. And here there was much for them to learn, for they had never had written examinations before. The fairness and impartiality of the proceedings, leaving no chance for favoritism, the writing in ink, the answers to the questions, showing in this way how much or little they knew upon the subject, awakened them to the fact that a teacher's certificate in the government schools, when obtained, would be worth something.

"Very few of the candidates received certificates, but they received credits for what they earned on each subject, and cards showing these credits were sent to them. The examinations tended to rouse the teachers from indifference, idleness and qualify themselves for examinations to come.

A Teacher's Qualifications.

"The papers were not easy, though by no means unreasonable. To secure a principal's certificate the applicant was obliged to pass an examination in Spanish, in English, arithmetic in Spanish, arithmetic in English, geography and history of the United States, in Spanish or English, and a Spanish examination in school methods. For a title as a graded school teacher a successful examination was necessary in Spanish and English, but the applicant was at liberty to use Spanish or English in filling out the papers in arithmetic, geography and United States history. The rural school teachers were not required to pass an examination in English-Spanish was only necessary in order to obtain certificates.

Good Pay an Incentive.

"The money question is a great incentive to the native teachers. They must hold certificates from the insular board of education in order to secure positions, and draw their salary from the military government or, as we will soon say, from the civil government. They know too well, and often by bitter experience, how slow their pay comes, if at all, from the military system of education under the Spanish regime. While there is at present a scarcity of native teachers who hold these certificates, there are on the other hand a great number of well-educated young people in Porto Rico, who are working hard to secure them and so get good positions. The salaries vary from \$75 per month for principals to \$90 per month for rural teachers.

An American Free School.

"In Ponce there is an American free school, partly supported by the military government and partly from private enterprise by the citizens of the city.

"It has about 350 pupils and is doing excellent work, being a thorough-going school according to American ideas. This school was started soon after the Americans took possession of the island, and is wholly free from the old customs and usages of the Spanish schools, which customs still continue in vogue—the schools being modified only as the teachers and the people want to adopt American methods. The phrase military government carries the idea of compulsory measures, but there is nothing of this kind in the educational work in Porto Rico. The municipal councils are at perfect liberty to have such schools as they wish. Our public school system is there to proffer its help in education, and only asks the co-operation of the municipal council in conforming to the school laws. If they are ready to do this well and good; if not, they wait a little, but soon see the need of taking hold and doing their part in order to secure the government appropriations.

Municipal Co-Operation.

"For example, the government appropriation for Ponce, aside from aid to the American free school, provides for a principal and five teachers for a girls' graded school; for a principal and five teachers for a boys' graded school; for a principal and three teachers for a graded school at the Playa, the port of Ponce. It also provides for twenty-five rural teachers in the district of Ponce. This means that the government will, under certain conditions, pay the salaries of these teachers, furnish books and school furniture. What is the municipal council to do in order to secure this great benefit? It must secure buildings for these schools, suitable in point of light, ventilation and general conveniences, pay the rent for the same, and meet the incidental expenses, as janitors' bills, etc.

After the Hurricane.

"The appalling hurricane of August 8 destroyed thousands of buildings. All that withstood the tempest and the flood were needed, and it seemed for a while impossible to make headway in educational work. But in spite of all hindrances advance is being made. The idea is to do as much as possible to give education to the children of Porto Rico, and to leave as far as possible each school in the care of the municipality of the town where the school is located. They can elect the teachers, employing whomsoever they wish, if they simply comply with the school laws. If they want American teachers they can look to the insular board of education at San Juan and they will be provided. The requirements for certificates from American teachers are substantially the same as the requirements in the states.

"The Porto Ricans will soon understand the rules and regulations of our public school system, and I believe that before long there will be a great demand from the natives for American teachers. The children are very bright and are very eager to learn English."

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